1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

sitting at the door of the central house, with huts all around in which his younger wives lived, as they could not be made to dwell under the same roof. . . . The French priests attempted to alter this state of things, but they did not succeed, as the wives, surrounding the intruders, asked them what was to be their position if the husband selected one among them and abandoned the rest." [10]

Elsewhere St. John speaks of the institution of *plaçage* by name, mentioning its prevalence prior to the period of his residence in Haiti.[11] Mackenzie, though not calling it by this term, tells of a rural Negro who, in the course of a long conversation during which the name of an officer of rank in the Republic came up, made the observation "with admirable naiveté and exquisite logic, 'C'est mon beau frère, parceque je vis avec sa sœur.'" [12]

Plural marriage is no less common in the valley of Mirebalais than elsewhere in Haiti. Despite the insistence of the Church on monogamy, many men have two "wives," a few have three or four, while one important priest of the *vodun* cult is said to have eight. The force of the sanctions behind monogamy and Church unions, however, has undoubtedly influenced the psychological "set" of the Haitian toward polygyny, as is especially to be seen in the violent manifestations of jealousy shown by co-wives toward one another. It is primarily because of this that polygynous households, such as are mentioned in earlier writings, are not found in present-day Mirebalais, and this also explains why a man with more than one spouse sees to it that where possible his "wives" live at such distance from one another that they have but little opportunity to meet. Even then, on occasion, a newly taken *placée* will pace in front of the house of her man's other spouse, flaunting the clothes and trinkets she has received from him. Or if women who share the same mate meet in the

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

one. Sometimes a loa who is making life too hard for a devotee will be retired without a replacement. The "washing of the head" must be accompanied by ritual safeguards, and all possible circumstances must be taken into account by the officiating cult priest. There are many stories of people who became mentally deranged as a result of the removal of their loa from their heads.

The mait' tête must also be removed from the head of a person who dies. Should this not be done, the spirit of the deceased will go to reside "below the water" and may cause trouble for the family. This loa is usually transferred to a special jar as a temporary resting place, and later perhaps into the head of another member of the family.

Though the loa is a powerful ruling force in the life of the individual, the human "horse" has controls over his deity too. He may reproach or admonish his loa for bad behavior or for failing to protect him. He may expose the loa's irresponsibility in public through the use of songs in religious rites. And though the loa is frequently encouraged to "enter," steps may be taken to restrain him from possession. This is called *marré loa* —"tying the loa." A woman may "tie" her loa by fixing a hairpin in her hair in a special way. A man may do it by placing his hands in cold water.[3]

Nevertheless, the loa are always lurking in the background. They are a constant and dramatic element in the religious life of the people. They may sometimes be controlled by the houngan, but they are an authority stronger than the priesthood. They give advice, courage, consolation, and status to their followers. They add much to an otherwise hard and ungenerous environment and evoke remembrances of Africa from which the Haitians' ancestors were uprooted. They can also cause concern and anxiety; for the loa are not always benevolent, and they are frequently unpredictable.

Many of the loa are ancient deities, sib-founders and ancestors who loom out of a misty, half-forgotten past. Nananbouclou, Legba, and Ayida Wèdo have been known for many lifetimes in Dahomey. Chango, Ogoun, and Loko were old spirits in Nigeria before the first slave ships sailed from Africa to the New World. Their names and many others in present-day Haiti come from an ancient lore. They recall places, tribes, and old kingdoms from Senegal in northwestern Africa to the heart of the Congo. They are a bond which holds the people of Haiti to Africa. In the mountains people sometimes say, "Haiti is the child of Dahomey," or "Haiti is the child of Guinée." The gods divide their time between their Haitian and their African children.

Yet in some respects the Haitians' concept of their loa is no longer purely African. The African religious patterns have been infiltrated by the lore

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

named in the song has been dead for years does not seem to matter very much:

Mènè'm allé oh parleur!	Take me to the parlor!
Mènè'm allé!	Take me!
Mènè'm allé!	Take me!
Mènè'm allé oh parleur Borno!	Take me to Borno's parlor!
Mènè'm allé oh! [Ex. 120]	Take me, oh!

Sometimes the challenge is directed to a more lowly level of authority, such as the gendarme:

Gendarme, mènè'm nan bureau!
Rwo, gendarme oh! [Ex. 121]

Gendarme, take me to the police station!
Rwo, gendarme, oh!

Haitians are notable for their restraint from physical violence. During holiday celebrations it is not uncommon to see men who have drunk enough tafia to make them act up. Some of them may even be morose and bellicose. But the disturbances of the peace more often than not are verbal. So long as the first blow is not struck, the social pressures against violence operate effectively. But physical assault against an individual—a push, a blow, a slap—is an affront to personal dignity which relieves the victim of the social restraints and gives him the right to bodily revenge. I have seen waterfront rows, fierce and vocal, in which no one but the participants showed much interest. But should one man shove or strike another, the spectators would immediately interfere, for that single physical contact would have removed the barriers to the worst violence. Sometimes at carnival time a man assumes the guise of belligerence. Such a bully may roll up one trouser leg to indicate he is challenging all and sundry to a fight. Usually, passers-by move aside good-naturedly when he approaches. He is not taken seriously; but neither is he challenged, except by another man in the same frame of mind. When two men with rolled trouser legs meet, there may be a verbal encounter, possibly from opposite sides of the street, to the general entertainment of the bystanders. It is usually a serio-comic affair. Some of the folk songs memorialize occasions on which a man has publicly spoiled for a fight, real or imaginary. This song comments briefly on a man named Çalira, who looked for trouble:

Woy woy woy!
Woy woy woy!
Woy woy woy!
Çac bien arrangé corps yo!
Mène en bataille là!

Parents are generally kind to their children, so far as physical
855 punishment is concerned. The average peasant child can hardly
861 properly be said to be "brought up": he merely grows, eats whatever
● 157 his family eats or whatever fruits he can pick up, and learns his place in the community as he matures. In anger, parents are likely to use in correction the first thing that comes to hand. There is a surprising callousness to pain among these generally kindly people: they beat their donkeys unmercifully, and strap harness over open sores; they carry chickens, head down and feet tied together and mouths gaping, for miles in the sun; they revel in gory cockfights. If, therefore, a parent is minded to beat his child, he will probably do a thorough
[578] job of it. A peasant woman, pommeling her son with a broomstick, replied to the protests of a white passer-by, "*Li nègue; li pas fait li mal.*" ("He's a Negro; it won't hurt him.") The interference of a stranger in the beating of a wife by her man, armed with a club, was resented by both man and woman as an interference with a purely family quarrel.

831 The concept of sexual continence is lacking among the peasants.
834 Sex, indeed, hardly enters the realm of morality except in connection
864 with adulterous dalliance of one man with another's woman. There is no virtue in abstaining from sex relations when the sexual urge is strong. Mothers tell love stories in all their frank details to their young daughters, and some who care about such matters are adept in all lore connected with stimulating and satisfying a man's desire.[5]
[342] Since huts are small and the whole family sleeps in the same room, children have ample opportunity to observe the sexual life of their parents. If a girl, as a result of her own experiments, has a child born to her, there is no disgrace. Practically every peasant is "illegitimate," so that the term means nothing; a baby will soon be old enough to assist in the work of the home, thus becoming an asset. It is expected that as soon as a youth grows up he will find a mate and begin a family of his own.

241 The family is as important an element of peasant life as formal
439 marriage is unimportant. It is the economic unit. Ever since the days
593 of Pétion Haitian economy has been one of small things: even the crops are small subsistence crops of maize, millet, beans, rice, yams, and frequently trees of bananas, plantains, and coffee, which require no particular cultivation. Enough coffee has been produced in Haiti for annual export ever since 1804, but until recent years the beans

5. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 22 ff.